

Mayor's Ad-Hoc Parking Study Committee
Monday, December 21, 2009
4:30 PM
Council Chambers

In attendance: Councilor Keith Nyhan, Councilor Allen Bennett, Will Delker, Charlie Russell, Jim Corrigan, John Hoyt

Staff: Carlos Baía, David Florence, Brad Osgood, Matt Walsh

Absent: Councilor Rob Werner, Jeff Bart

Meeting convened at 4:35 pm.

Approval of the November 30, 2009 minutes

The minutes were approved unanimously.

Parking Fund: Short to Medium-Term Alternatives

Carlos Baía noted that per the last meeting, staff was tasked with providing short to medium-term options and fiscal analysis that the committee could recommend to City Council for implementation in FY 11. Mr. Baía explained that Mr. Florence had prepared various alternatives for review.

Mr. Florence began by distributing a handout summarizing the analysis for items he planned to cover.

Free Downtown Holiday Parking

Mr. Florence noted that the elimination of the free downtown holiday parking would net approximately \$10,000 in revenue for the City. Based on observations from his staff, many of the parkers taking advantage of the free spaces are the same cars that are merely shifting a few spaces and tend to be habitual offenders of the meters. Mr. Florence believes this 2 week amnesty should be revisited with Main Street Concord because he and his staff feel that it is primarily being used by the employees defeating the goal of meters to turn over spaces allowing for customer access.

Councilor Nyhan asked if the amnesty period is only two weeks. Mr. Florence answered in the affirmative and noted that in earlier years, the merchants would approach Council annually seeking to have such a period. Ultimately, the City decided to make it a recurring activity.

Action: The committee recommended elimination of the free holiday parking.

Rate Increase to \$.75

The next topic of discussion was a possible increase in the meter rates to \$.75 from the current \$.50. Mr. Florence estimated that this change—if implemented across the board—would generate approximately \$66,000. Mr. Florence carried as an underlying assumption a drop of 25% in usage from today's levels. Will Delker asked what the drop-off was the last time this rate was increased. Mr. Walsh replied that the City had seen a 47% loss of usage. Mr. Florence, however, felt that the enforcement areas (with the recommendations in place) would leave drivers with few attractive alternatives to park outside of a meter. Councilor Bennett believed that there might be short-term drop but that it should pick up after time.

Councilor Nyhan asked about the logic of increasing the rate across the board rather than having a higher rate, for example, in the street to drive parkers into the garages. Mr. Florence explained that if the rate were increased universally, the City could offer the parking cards at a \$.25 per hour discount. These could be used by the employees to get them to park in the garages (the cards are not accepted on Main Street meters). Such an outcome would free up the premium street spaces for customers.

Councilor Nyhan noted that the problem with the cards is the lack of efficiency and the inconvenience for the consumer of having to go to one central location to add value.

Mr. Delker concurred noting that he has gone to the Police Department on a number of occasions to recharge his card only to be turned away because the pertinent staffer was unavailable.

Mr. Florence explained the limitations of the system but also indicated that he has gone to places of employment in the downtown to charge cards on site. This approach has interested some of the merchants who feel that it provides a convenience and might bring in customers.

Mr. Nyhan asked what the will of the committee was regarding the meter rate increase. Councilor Bennett indicated that the City needs to find a solution as there are many employees parking at meters. Mr. Florence concurred stating that if there are spots available, customers will park regardless of this \$.25 increase.

Mr. Delker expressed that his biggest frustration to downtown parking is the need for quarters. He felt that if the committee were to recommend a rate increase it should also pursue some alternative system that could accept a credit card such as the kiosks.

Mr. Florence indicated that he was not able to obtain the pertinent information from the kiosk vendor that is servicing Portsmouth and Manchester in time for the meeting. Based on the information he had gathered so far, it appeared that if the City were to install 60 kiosks there might not be any capital costs with the vendor recovering his profit from the monthly leasing option. If the City were to buy the 60 kiosks it would probably cost \$600,000 which would be roughly \$70,000 more than the cost of replacing all of the

current meters and would also afford the City—at minimum—a projected 25% increase in meter revenue.

Charlie Russell asked about the average life of the current meters. Mr. Florence replied that the City plans for the meters to last about 5-6 years. He added that there are \$65,000 programmed this fiscal year and next in the City's CIP for replacement. Mr. Florence further stated that with the kiosk system, Manchester saw its meter revenue increase by 33% and Portsmouth by 40%.

Action: The committee could not come to agreement on the increase of the meter rate to \$.75 at this time but asked staff to come back with pricing and other information on a possible kiosk system to revisit this alternative.

Elimination of “Free Fridays” at Capital Commons Garage

In addressing the phenomenon of “free Fridays” at the Capital Commons Garage, Mr. Florence indicated that he had discussed this with Deputy Chief Osgood. It was believed that the patrol officer for that sector could raise the gates much later in the evening.

Councilor Nyhan strongly suggested that the gates be raised as close to midnight as possible making this only a “free Saturday” arrangement rather than one in which someone parking all day on Friday or perhaps longer can leave the garage without payment.

Mr. Russell asked if staff had numbers on how many people abused the current system. Mr. Florence estimated that it might be around 20 vehicles per week.

Action: The committee recommended the use of the patrol officer to raise the Capital Commons Parking Garage gate later on Fridays.

In reviewing the changes proposed thus far, Mr. Russell believed that there might be a tremendous political fall-out if all were adopted at the same time. Mr. Baía reminded the committee that the task before them is to make recommendations to secure the health of the parking fund. It will be up to Council—in their role as elected officials—to determine how many or which of the recommendations should be implemented based on an examination of factors community-wide.

Mr. Delker concluded that even if the committee supports all of the short-to-medium term alternatives presented by staff, the parking fund will ultimately still be in the red. He reiterated his belief that more people would park if the existing street system were not dependent on quarters.

Increasing Meter Violations from \$5 to \$10

In terms of increasing the fine for meter violations from the current \$5 to \$10, Mr. Florence noted that Concord would be in line with other communities in New Hampshire. He observed that there are parkers that will pay a series of weekly parking tickets every Friday rather than feed the meters due to the low violation rates.

Mr. Delker asked when the last fine increase was. Mr. Florence replied that it last occurred in 2003 going from \$3 to \$5.

Charlie Russell asked what is the non-meter parking violation fine. Mr. Florence stated it to be \$15.

Mr. Russell expressed that \$5 was too low. Councilor Nyhan agreed.

Action: The committee recommended the increase of the meter fine to \$10.

Weekday Enforcement from 8am to 8pm

On the topic of extending the hours of enforcement from 8am to 8pm in the evening, Mr. Florence noted that some staffing changes would be needed but that the net could be between \$87,000 to \$104,000 (depending on FT versus PT staff utilization).

Mr. Russell asked what the utilization rate is now between 5pm and 8pm. Mr. Florence estimated it to be 75%.

Councilor Nyhan asked where the 75% figure is derived from. Mr. Florence admitted that it was based on a cursory observation.

Action: The committee agreed to table further action on this alternative pending more information on the kiosk system.

Saturday Meter Enforcement

Concerning the enforcement of meters on Saturdays, Mr. Florence noted that net revenue was projected at between \$132,000-\$158,000 depending on staff utilization.

Councilor Nyhan expressed that he is in favor of Saturday enforcement.

Mr. Russell felt that the merchants would probably not favor Saturdays as much as they might support extending weekday hours to 8pm. Mr. Delker observed that the one notable exception would be the bars.

Mr. Russell asked if it would make sense to only enforce for a half-day on Saturday (to 1pm for example) as this seemed to be the time when the meters were most used.

The discussion returned to the challenge with the current system of not taking credit cards. Mr. Hoyt cited the ease of the Manchester kiosks. He was concerned about the practicality of establishing alternate enforcement times under our current system; particularly as it impacted the merchants.

Mr. Florence noted that another option might be to sell permits.

Councilor Nyhan suggested that staff invite Jessica Eshleman, Executive Director of Main Street Concord, to the next meeting to review the committee's recommendations thus far and its direction for the future.

Mr. Russell suggested a visit to the Main Street organization directly would provide a less intimidating, more productive setting (rather than the Council Chambers) for this type of discussion.

Staff agreed to visit with Ms. Eshleman to apprise her of the committee's work.

Action: Committee recommended Saturday enforcement of meters from 8am to 5pm.

Jim Corrigan asked what the point of this committee and its work was. He believed that it was about correcting the revenue picture in the parking fund. Yet, he noted, the committee was spending quite a lot of time discussing the merchants' interests.

Councilor Nyhan stated that what was driving this was a revenue shortfall in the parking fund. He noted that part of the conundrum was that the committee is trying to plug a deficit in the short-term to allow more time to study other areas of the fund such as parking garages to get a better determination of what is causing the long-term deficit.

Mr. Corrigan wondered if the entire parking system wouldn't be better off run by an independent, private entity.

Councilor Bennett cited the history of the Capital Commons garage and why it was built as large as it is. He admitted that the Council of which he was a part of at the time made assumptions about future usage that were not borne out based on two primary factors: the economic downturn and the developer of the Capital Commons office building who has not been—in the Councilor's opinion—as aggressive in leasing the building as he expected. The repercussions of the Capital Commons garage are the reason, according to Councilor Bennett, why the ad-hoc committee was convened.

Mr. Corrigan conceded that there is wisdom in building larger. However, he noted that the City appears to have created its own challenges by negotiating agreements in the garages over history that have fixed the City's income but not its expenses.

Councilor Nyhan asked Mr. Baía if he had prepared any alternatives regarding staff reconfigurations or reorganization. Mr. Baía was not aware that this was an item that the committee had sought for the meeting but would have staff look at it for the future.

Free Parking on Storrs Street

Mr. Baía asked if the Committee would also want to address the issue of the free parking at the south end of Storrs Street.

The committee agreed that this was an important issue.

Action: Committee recommends that the free parking at the south end of Storrs Street be eliminated.

Proper Allocation of Salary/Benefit Costs

Mr. Baía also sought the committee's direction relative to the allocation of costs for the Police Officer and Administrative Specialist. Per an earlier meeting, the Parking Fund is paying 100% of both salaries and benefits despite the fact that significant portions of the daily job duties for these positions are outside the purview of parking.

Action: Committee recommends that the allocation of costs be in-line with % of work dedicated to the parking fund.

In summary, the Committee made the following recommendations:

1. Allocate salary & benefit costs according to proper fund usage;
2. Eliminate free parking at south end of Storrs Street;
3. Institute Saturday meter enforcement from 8am to 5pm;
4. Increase the meter violation charge from \$5 to \$10;
5. Reduce the likelihood of "free Fridays" at the Capital Commons garage by having police officer raise the gate as late as possible on Friday night;
6. Eliminate free holiday parking.

The committee agreed to re-visit the meter rate increase to \$.75 and the increased weekday hours to 8pm pending additional information regarding kiosk system and input from Main Street Concord.

Next meeting was tentatively scheduled for January 18th but it was discovered that this was the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. Councilor Nyhan asked staff to coordinate an alternate date with the committee members via email.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm